

April
2020

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

**Our 2020
Rising Stars
of Animation**

**Apple TV+
Celebrates
Earth Day**

**DreamWorks
Revisits the
Trolls Universe**

**Netflix Introduces
the Unusual
Willoughbys**

**A Quest for a Missing Dad:
Behind the Scenes of Pixar's**

Onward

\$7.95 U.S.



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Pixar's Epic,
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DreamWorks'

Trolls World Tour:

A Magical, Musical Thrill Ride

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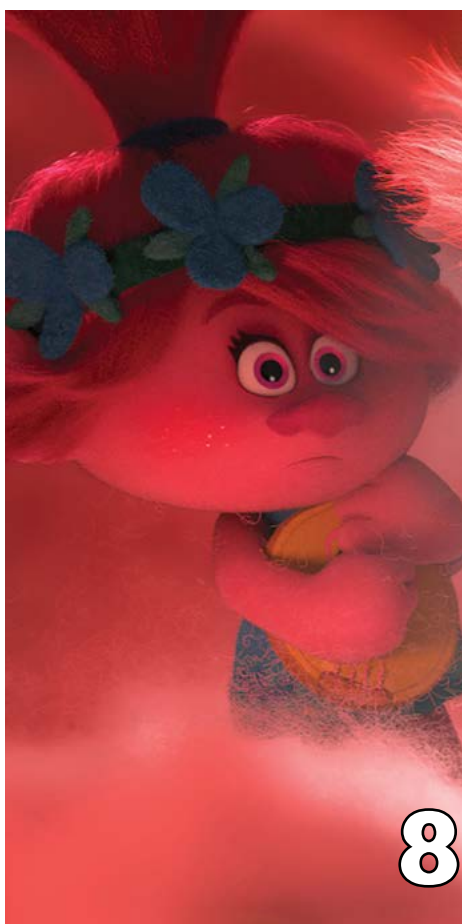
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EDITOR'S NOTE



I am sure you will agree that the first quarter of 2020 has proved quite an unpredictable period for all of us, no matter where we live or what we do for a living. With the cancellation of many of the usual animation and VFX events we attend and cover due to the global spread of COVID-19, we have all been dealing with a certain amount of uncertainty and anxiety. As much as it's important to practice all the public health and safety precautions, it's also normal to hope that things will return to the way they were

just a few months ago.

It's been only a few weeks since we learned of the cancellation of Hong Kong Filmart, SXSW, MIPTV, NAB, E3 and FMX and watched as media stocks crashed when the World Health Organization officially announced the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. Like you, we are hoping that countries all over the world will be able to contain and fight this terrible disease as soon as possible. In the meantime, we should all pay close attention to the guidelines provided by the scientific and medical experts (WHO is a good resource: who.int/emergencies/novel-coronavirus-2019), stay safe and try and be

there for those who are in need of compassion and assistance as much as possible.

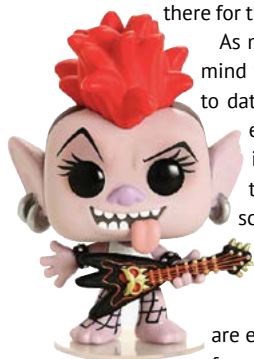
As many in our industry are now working from home, we would like to remind you that we're doing everything we can to make sure we keep you up to date with the latest developments in the world of animation and visual effects. Since many of our industry events may continue to be cancelled in the weeks ahead, make sure you sign up to get our daily newsletter take advantage of our free digital subscription offer by visiting the Subscribe page at animationmagazine.net and entering the code MHOME20.

We also have a special discount on our print subscription rates available for a limited time.

We hope you enjoy reading about three new animated features that are either released theatrically or will be available for streaming in the next few weeks. Disney-Pixar's *Onward* has already found its base among animation fans and received praise from critics worldwide, while DreamWorks' *Trolls World Tour* is ready to hit the screens in the U.S. on April 10. We have excellent behind-the-scenes stories on both titles by our longtime contributors Karen Idelson and Tom McLean. We also have a sneak peek at Kris Pearn's whimsical new feature *The Willoughbys*, which will premiere on Netflix this month. We're sure you've never seen an animated family quite like this one before!

Our "Rising Stars of Animation" feature has been a popular part of our April issues for the past few years, and 2020 is no exception. It has become more difficult to keep the number of profiles down to 14, because there are so many talented individuals working in our thriving industry today. So, consider our 2020 selection just a sampler. We look forward to profiling more of these brilliant animation stars. Remember, you can always recommend your favorite toon talent by emailing us at edit@animationmagazine.net.

Here's to all of us keeping safe, healthy and hopeful in the weeks ahead. And please, leave some toilet paper and hand sanitizer for everyone else at the stores!



Funko POP! Trolls
Queen Barb vinyl toy

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor in Chief
ramin@animationmagazine.net

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Finding just the right creative partner to bring Willy Wonka, Charlie and the Oompa-Loompas to life in animation was a daunting task...until Taika Waititi walked into the room. Then, it was really obvious. If Raold Dahl had created a character of a filmmaker to adapt his work, I'm pretty sure he would have created Taika."

— Melissa Cobb, Netflix VP of original animation, discussing recent news that Waititi is attached to write, direct and exec produce two original animated series based on Charlie and the Chocolate Factory's original characters.



Illustration by Quentin Blake

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Personal Magic

How director Dan Scanlon used some of his own family's poignant experiences to build the fantastical world of Pixar's *Onward*.

By Karen Idelson

Will Pixar be able to deliver the usual mix of comedy and pathos in its 22nd theatrical feature? That's the question on many animation lovers' minds as they get ready to take in the much-anticipated movie *Onward* in March. In the movie, two elf brothers take on a magical quest to try to reunite with their long-lost father after a botched bit of wizardry only brings back his lower half. This animated road picture is Pixar's first foray into this realm of storytelling and was inspired by director Dan Scanlon's own experiences growing up.

Like the main characters in the movie, Scanlon and his older brother lost their father at an early age and always wondered what kind of

person he was and what it would be like to meet him and have the kinds of experiences most kids have with their parents. So, Scanlon, who also directed *Monsters, Inc.*, began playing with the idea of how that might work in an animated story.

"It's a very personal story," says Scanlon. "Much like the characters in the story, my father passed away when I was about a year old and my brother was three. So, as you can imagine, we don't remember him at all. But we always wonder, you know, who he was and how are we like him? And I think that question

became the seed of *Onward* — which is, if you could have one day [with your father], what would you learn? What would you ask? And, yeah, we added elves and sprites to that incredibly sad story."

Blue Is the Elfiest Color

Scanlon started working on the story about six years ago. The script soon became about the dynamic of these two brothers — an older one named Barley who was more



Missing Father

Figure: Teen elf brothers Ian and Barley Lightfoot (Tom Holland and Chris Pratt) face many obstacles as they set out on a quest to bring back *all* of their late father for one last day.



rough and tumble and leapt into things without thinking too much, and Ian, the younger brother who was cautious, more introverted and anxious around people.

Tom Holland voices Ian and Chris Pratt voices Barley in the film. Julia Louis-Dreyfus plays their mother. Ali Wong, Octavia Spencer and Tracey Ullman also lend their voices to the film.

"We needed a way in which the father could come back to life," says Scanlon. "That really is the reason behind the magic. We could have done, and considered, a version in which the boys were scientists who built a machine that brought Dad back. The magic just felt more romanticized. And we didn't want to set it in an old timey fantasy world, because it's a modern story. And if these boys had been in robes and their father had been in robes, it just would have been ridiculous. And I think the world mirrors Ian in a lot of ways. The world of

this movie is people who have just become complacent and are fearful of taking risks. They've lost their potential. Ian is a kid who's never lived up to his because he's insecure and fearful. So, it's always nice when the world

'Much like the characters in the story, my father passed away when I was about a year old and my brother was three. So, as you can imagine, we don't remember him at all but we always wonder, you know, who he was and how are we like him? And I think that question became the seed of *Onward*.'

— Writer/director Dan Scanlon

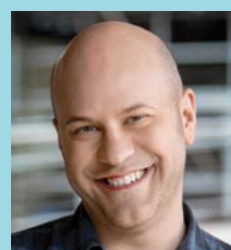
hood of 20 years ago. The filmmakers wanted a fantasy suburb where elves could live and that audiences would feel was real somehow.

When they'd decided to tell a story full of sorcery and magic, the fun and the complications quickly began. They didn't want something that had been seen by fans of animation and mythic tales already. Producer Kori Rae, who worked with Scanlon on *Monsters, Inc.*, knew the magic had to be special and fit with the story they wanted to tell.

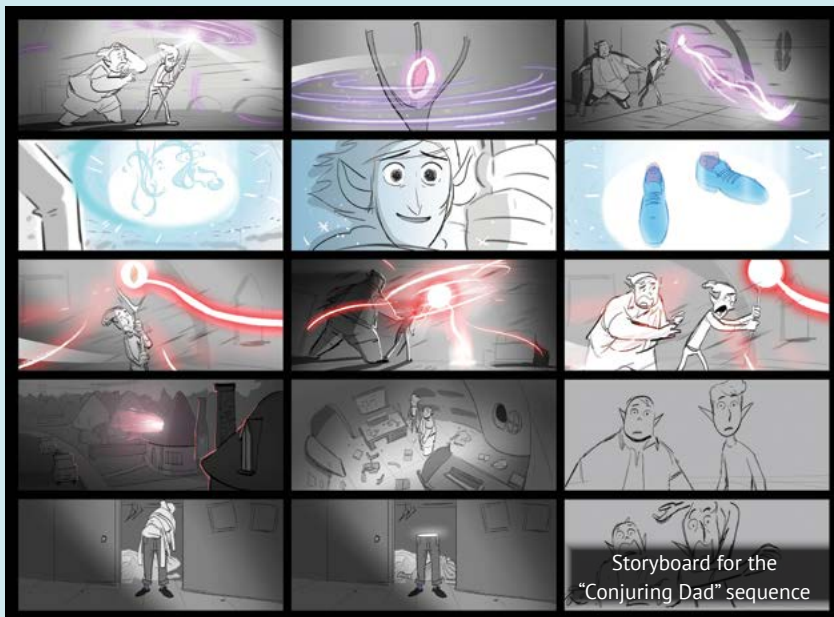
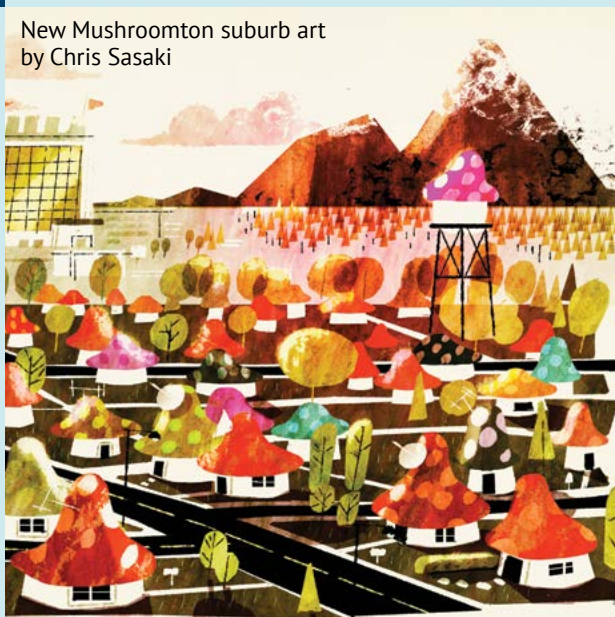
Multiple departments would have to work together to bring Scanlon's vision to the screen.

Chaos Theory of Magic

"The magic was tricky in terms of just a looks exploration," says Rae. "But it was also so specific to the story and Ian's character. How the magic behaved was directly related to what we needed for him and it needed to be



New Mushroomton suburb art
by Chris Sasaki



chaotic and it needed to be a little bit scary. And, from a looks perspective, we put in a lot of time for development. So, it wasn't necessarily new technology but I think how we approached it was slightly different. We did some 2D exploration just to try to get the look and figure out what it needed to be and then to figure out how do we get that into the computer. We spent a lot of time on magic because we wanted it to be kind of chaotic for this story."

Supervising technical director Sanjay Bakshi and character supervisor Jeremie Talbot also worked together to have artists create and model all the fantasy characters individually, since they were all unique. This gave them a more realistic look that was specific to each species. In past films, the team had added controls that could alter features, but this time they felt a more individualized approach was needed.

As the boys quest for the magic to get the rest of their father back in 24 hours, they're opposed by both Ian's own fears and other fantastical creatures. Scanlon wanted to keep

humor in focus even when the battles felt scary and genuinely perilous. He decided to give his mythical beasts "teeth" but also give them the kind of comic elements that kept the funny tone of the film in place.

"In the earliest days, we had the boys fighting a mythical dragon or something," says Scanlon. "And it felt like suddenly we were in any fantasy movie. It wasn't funny. It just didn't seem unique. And then we realized the promise of this movie is that it's always going to be a little bit funny or a little bit modern or silly. And you can still be terrifying and have those elements. So, we just realized whatever we do with the end, it has to be a mix of fantasy and the everyday. It just came down to the idea that monsters are always made up of your greatest fears and Ian's greatest fears are made up of his life as a teenager."

With a large team on *Onward*, Scanlon and Rae's biggest challenge was keeping everyone on the same page throughout production. And there's really no app for that. It comes down to

the most old fashioned way of all — face-to-face communication.

"All of that information is tracked in the database as part of our tracking system but what it literally comes down to is communication and getting people in one room," says Rae. "That's the only way to do it. No amount of documents are going to do it because people aren't going to read through them and nobody reads email. So, what really needs to happen is getting everyone in one room — all the different departments — and having Dan there with them, making sure that they know exactly what the story needs for that scene and then just figuring out the logistics together, talking about the images and looking at the images that are up there at least once and maybe twice a day. It's the best." ♦

Disney/Pixar's *Onward* is currently playing in theaters worldwide. The movie received an 87% score on Rotten Tomatoes and made over \$67.1 million worldwide in its opening weekend.



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Jamming to Different Drums:

Poppy (Anna Kendrick) and Branch (Justin Timberlake) discover they're part of a vast network of music-loving Trolls spread out across six lands devoted to different genres of music in the high-energy sequel.



Brighter, Louder, Wilder!

Walt Dohrn and his team at DreamWorks push the musical and visual envelope in their second visit to the Trolls' universe.

By Tom McLean

Like any good pop confection, DreamWorks Animation's 2016 hit feature *Trolls* told a sweet, warm and fuzzy heartfelt tale full of catchy pop tunes that left audiences hungry for more. And more of pretty much everything that made the first movie a hit is exactly what director Walt Dohrn had in mind for the sequel, *Trolls World Tour*, which arrives April 17 in theaters.

"It was always like, okay, there's gotta be more characters, more new worlds, and — I think because music was such a positive experience in the first film — we said there's gotta be more music," says Dohrn, who co-directed the first CG-animated outing.

Trolls World Tour delivers all of that and more, telling a story in which the newly crowned Queen Poppy (Anna Kendrick) dis-

covers that hers is one of six tribes of Trolls, and each is dedicated to a different genre of music: Pop, Country, Techno, Classical, Funk and Rock. That discovery comes as Queen Barb (Rachel Bloom) launches a scheme for rock 'n' roll to conquer and rule over all other types of music, propelling Poppy and Branch (Justin Timberlake) on a quest to unite all the genres in peace, while figuring out their still-new relationship.

The movie introduces characters to populate each land, bringing in as voices such music icons as Ozzy Osbourne, Anderson .Paak, George Clinton, Mary J. Blige, Kelly Clarkson, Gwen Stefani, Gustavo Dudamel and the K-pop group Red Velvet. The film also features the voices of James Corden, Sam Rockwell and Ron Funches.

Growing a narrative and a world big enough to include them all is a big task, one that began during production on the first movie and resulted in a rough first draft for the sequel ready by the time the first *Trolls* was released in November 2016.

Expanding Musical Horizons

Producer Gina Shay says the project began as a way to make sure the first movie was capable of telling more stories if there was demand. "We wanted to make sure in making the first movie that it was a world that could be expanded," she says. "We all thought how about we expand the world and subvert the audience's expectations by creating this expansion through musical genres."

The focus on hard rock as the genre that



Iron Maiden: Tough-as-nails hard-rock songstress Queen Barb (Rachel Bloom) is the enemy of pop, country, techno, funk and classical music.



would incite the story came directly from the stereotype of hard rockers' dismissals as inferior of everything from pop to disco, says co-director David P. Smith. "It's where everyone's gut goes when you think of hard rock," says Smith.

Leading the charge is Queen Barb, whose look and attitude was inspired by such classic rockers as Debbie Harry and Joan Jett and fleshed out beyond the surface flash of a music video to give her an extra dimension. "We started exploring the different depths of what makes this character tick, especially her admiration for her music and her community and her friendships and her father and things like that," says Smith. Her father, King Thrash, is voiced by Osbourne — essentially playing himself — in one of the movie's funnier cameos.

Expanding the fabric-based visual textures of *Trolls* lead to some interesting places as well, with production designer Kendal Cronkhite applying the fabric concept to each of the different worlds. The results were as diverse as the musical genres themselves, Dohrn says, creating everything from the underwater techno tribe and a country-inspired quilted desert landscape to a classic leather, denim and studs look for the rockers.

Hitting the Right Notes

Key to the movie is the choice of music, which ended up being a more even mix

of Timberlake-produced originals and covers of classics from each musical genre. Shay says sometimes the right song for a moment in the movie was easy to find, while others took a lot more work — all of it subject to licensing availability and affordability.

"We wanted to make sure that we were being as diverse as possible within each genre," says Shay. "And we just cast the most authentic people who could sing in that style, who also have comedy chops and acting chops.

And when we cast for *Trolls* we do cast people who feel like they carry the core methodology or the core belief system of *Trolls*, which is positivity, empowerment."

Some lyrics to popular songs were changed to fit the narrative, such as Cyndi Lauper's iconic "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." Lauper's "True Colors" was used in a key moment in the first film and helped define the franchise's musical identity, so Dohrn says they wanted to include another of her songs in *Trolls World Tour*. The altered lyrics were tried out internally, with a rough demo put together before the studio reached out to Lauper for her input and approval.

Animating the new characters that populate these worlds — as well as the returning characters — was headed up by animation supervisor Carlos Puertolas. A huge fan of the first movie, Puertolas is a newcomer to working on the franchise and says that gave him a new perspective on the project. "In this movie, we're exploring so many different worlds that we decided to kind of double down on that idea and try to make each world feel a little different and have their own way of moving

14 to 15 shots, with each being given a moment to shine. "You had your own moment to come up with your own idea and kind of be the owner of that moment," Puertolas says.

Classic Inspirations

Dohrn says the film's character animation takes inspiration from stop-motion and the movements of Jim Henson's Muppets. He cites as influences the UPA style and the work of Ward Kimball doing things like holding poses. "We also thought this kind of stylized movement can live side by side with something more subtle when it needs to," he says. "Having more real movement next to a stylized movement, it's like it's all one language. It stays true to the character."

Choreographers also were part of the mix, creating dance moves the animators could use in the many musical sequences. With the characters having cartoon proportions like huge hands or an oversize head, there was a lot of adapting the moves to characters and moments when they work. "[Animators] would use that as reference in some areas where it could work, and on other areas it was more of an inspiration," Puertolas says.

On the technical end, *Trolls World Tour* used the studio's new proprietary renderer Moonray, which was not yet

'We also thought this kind of stylized [stop-motion-inspired] movement can live side by side with something more subtle when it needs to. Having more real movement next to a stylized movement, it's like it's all one language.'

— Director Walt Dohrn



and have a little bit of a different kind of style of animation," he says.

One way in which Puertolas says they changed things up was to assign animation supervisors to each world in the movie to help define each one. For example, in the Rock Troll world, the performances tried to incorporate the unpredictable behavior associated with rock stars, along with camera work with a more handheld quality.

Animators were given a workload of about

available on the first film. And motion blur was removed in many shots to give the movie a stop-motion feeling.

And if *Trolls World Tour* is a hit, Dohrn says he'd love to return once again to their bright, musical world. "I feel so close to these characters after six years, that they start to have a life of their own," he says. "And I enjoy that." ♦

Universal/DreamWorks' *Trolls World Tour* begins performing in theaters on April 10.



A Most Peculiar Family

Director Kris Pearn and production designer Kyle McQueen take us behind the scenes of their charming feature *The Willoughbys*, which debuts on Netflix in April.

By Ramin Zahed

The eccentric family at the center of Lois Lowry's 2008 book *The Willoughbys* is not your average, normal one — at least not the kind of happy units we're used to seeing in children's literature. That's why it was so important for writer/director Kris Pearn and his team at Canada's Bron Studios to preserve the offbeat humor and askew vision of the material in the new animated feature based on the property. The movie follows the misadventures of the mistreated Willoughby children as they learn to survive their neglectful parents (voiced by Jane Krakowski and Martin Short) and make a life for themselves with the aid of their nanny (Maya Rudolph) and Commander Melanoff (Terry Crews).

"What I loved about the book was its subversive sense of humor, which reminded me of the novels of Roald Dahl and Mordecai Richler," says Pearn, who directed Sony's feature *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2* and has worked as a storyboard artist on DreamWorks' *Home*, Sony's *Open Season* and *Hotel Transylvania*, and Aardman's *Arthur*

Christmas, *Shaun the Sheep Movie* and *Early Man*. Pearn was tapped by the film's producers Luke Carroll and Brenda Gilbert (one of the founders of Burnaby, British Columbia's Bron Animation) to write and direct the movie with co-director Rob Lodermeier about five years ago. Netflix will premiere the movie on April 22nd.

Pearn says the comedy in both the book and the movie comes from the oddball Willoughby characters' struggle to react to their familiar tropes. "As a father of two kids, I remember what it was like before they arrived on the scene," he notes. "Rubbish parenting was funny to me. The idea that the mysterious nanny might be a bit sketchy was funny. My kids, who are 17 and 20 now, have bounced around a lot with me," he explains. "They've lived all over

the world. I remember when they were weird and awkward, and now they're beautiful adults. In a way, the movie is celebrating the independence of the Willoughby kids and embracing their efforts to break out on their own."

A Feline Observer

Looking back at the evolution of the movie, Pearn pinpoints the addition of the cat narrator (voiced by Ricky Gervais) as a pivotal moment. "The creation of an animated movie is always an organic process," he notes. "In the book, there is a cat, but he is not the narrator. Our producer Luke Carroll came up with the idea of having the story told from this cat's point of view. Ricky Gervais was attached to the movie as an exec producer, and it just worked out perfectly to have him voice the cat, who is such an interesting, scatological creature. He can look at the camera and offer this wide-angle cat's point of view of the events. That was one of our initial touchstones."

The addition of production designer Kyle McQueen (*Sausage Party*) was another key event in forming the project's overall



Victims No More: The Willoughby kids band together to come up with a plan to keep their cruel parents away from their home in Kris Pearn's wildly eccentric movie.



aesthetic. "Kyle was one of my students at Sheridan College, and we immediately jelled on this idea of creating this wide-angle world with a handmade feeling," says Pearn. "We were also fortunate to have Craig Kell-

man as our character designer. I always thought his designs were brilliant, but somehow they got a bit compromised in their translation to big CG-animated movies because of the nature of the technology. But for this movie, I believe we got very close to translating his design language to the final look of the movie and marrying it with Kyle's production design."

McQueen says when Pearn told him about the movie and the visual design he was looking for, he was sure he was the right man for the job. "I loved the subversive humor of the book and Kris was great about involving all of us in the creative process and helped me evolve and design the story. We really hit the ground running in the fall of 2016."

He also points out that he and his team wanted to create something that didn't feel like what other studios were doing. "It was important for us to strive for this old-fashioned, handmade feel," says McQueen. "For example, rather than just working with a concrete building, we came up with material that would feel like the building, but also felt like a hand-crafted item. We used things like watercolor paper, washes, yarns, ribbons for grass, coffee grounds for dirt, etc."

The production designer says one of the big challenges for the production was finding the

'I think we live in a pretty mean world today, and the message of the movie is that everybody deserves love. I hope that's what audiences will take away from the movie, as well as laughing at a few fart and poop jokes along the way!'

— Writer-director Kris Pearn



right artists to work on the picture. "The scope of this film was very ambitious for Bron, which is a smaller studio in Canada," he notes. "We were happy to find several talented Sheridan interns and recent graduates to work on the movie. I can't say enough about our team, which absolutely killed it."

The artists relied on Bron's original animation pipeline, which uses Maya to render. "We had to make some major shader adjustments because the look of the film was so different from the previous projects they had made [*Henchmen*, *Mighty Mighty Monsters*]. We had to retrace the textures we wanted to use to get that tactile feeling."

Nimble Know-How

According to Pearn, about 250-300 people worked on the movie, either at Bron's studio in Burnaby, British Columbia, or its satellite offices in Duncan and London, Ontario. "One of the things that made this movie interesting was the way smaller studios can do things in a nimbler fashion," he explains. "There are improvisations that happen along the way, from using XGen for the hair texture or lighting effects that helped us achieve the look. However, breaking the story was one of the most challenging parts of the journey, because the book has a bit of a non-linear flow."

world today, and the message of the movie is that everybody deserves love. I love that the heart of the movie is about choosing love, and I hope that's what audiences will take away from the movie, as well as laughing at a few fart and poop jokes along the way!"

As we get ready to wrap the interview, Pearn mentions that he grew up as the eldest of three boys in a goat farm in the Southern Ontario region of Canada, so he really identifies with Tim, the oldest Willoughby boy in the movie (voiced by Will Forte). "I also got a bit of a cultural shock when I got to the real world. I kind of identify with that feeling of trying to look after your family, but not doing it quite so well," he admits.

"I am also very optimistic about animation and the current state of our industry," Pearn says. "There's so much diversity, not just in terms of human voices, but the types of movies that are being made. I am so happy that movies like *I Lost My Body* can find their own audience, and someone like Guillermo del Toro can make a weird animated family movie. I look at animation the same way I look at farming. You plant a lot of seeds in the ground, and five or six years later, you get to enjoy the results of your labor!" ♦

The Willoughbys premieres on Netflix on April 22.

ANIMAG'S 2020 RISING STARS OF ANIMATION

The 14 women and men we are profiling in this year's Rising Stars feature come from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines. What they share is a passion for the art and craft of animation and storytelling, deep respect for the trailblazers before them and a burning desire to make a difference in their specific field of expertise.

JULIEN BISARO

Storyboard Artist/Director, Xilam Animation

One of French storyboard artist and director Julien Bisaro's earliest movie memories goes back to the time he was seven or eight, when he saw Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, along with a stop-motion animation short *Bluebeard* by Olivier Gillon. As he describes it, "It was a baroque profusion of creativity and unbridled imagination that left a deep mark on me!"

The 38-year-old Saint-Avold native studied at the Beaux-Arts Academy of Epinal and went on to train at the prestigious La Poudrière animation school. Soon, he found himself working as background and layout artist on *Brendan and the Secret of Kells*; animator and chief layout designer on *Ernest & Celestine*; storyboarder and co-graphic designer on *Le Tableau*; and most recently as an Annie-nominated storyboard artist on the multi-award-winning feature *I Lost My Body*.



Bisaro's animated short *Bang Bang!* was nominated for a César and was a festival favorite in 2015. His most recent half-hour short

Shoom's Odyssey was released in French theaters in January. He's now developing his first feature with Xilam's CEO and producer Marc du Pontavice.

He tells us that he loves the storyboard and animatics stages of an animated project. "For me, it's like writing with images," he explains. "You can experiment with so many things, design a film's shape. It's a pleasant stage in the work, because it doesn't require massive investment. You can get rid of whatever doesn't work and start over again until you reach the emotion you're after!"

Bisaro maintains that kicking off a new project is always a challenge. "I just finished a medium-length feature for preschoolers," he points out. "We wanted to create a first film experience for very young children (three-year olds), a non-anthropomorphic view of animals in nature. The new feature film I'm developing also focuses on nature and animals, but this time, we aim for an adult audience. Though the subjects are very close, the issues and intrigues are completely different, and that's what makes it very stimulating."

He is quite modest when we ask him to share some career advice with us. His response is, "I don't feel that it's entirely appropriate for me to offer advice about working in animation, but I'd recommend that you mustn't forget your personal motivations, the ones that led you into the business. It is very important to maintain a space of personal creativity." Now these are words to keep close to your heart.

GYIMAH GARIBA

Show Creator/Designer, *Big Blue*, Guru Studio

When Gyimah Gariba was a young boy growing up in Accra, Ghana, he was influenced by a wide range of animated shows and movies, from *Dexter's Laboratory* and *Wacky Races*, to classic Looney Tunes cartoons and Disney features. When he was 18, he was accepted into a B.A. program for illustration as well as animation. "My best friend helped me choose animation because I was really into film at the time. It seemed like a good way to engage storytelling, music and acting while also getting to have input on visuals," he recalls.

His first big break happened when he interned as a character designer on the first season of *Black Dynamite* at Titmouse alongside some of his draftsman heroes. These days, he is overseeing his own show *Big Blue* at Toronto's Guru Studio. "Growing up, I loved *The Little Mermaid* and that generated an interest in the mystery of the underwater world," he notes. "The whole idea that it is as much of an unexplored mystery as outer space was always really exciting to me. I also always wanted to tell a story that revolved around kids being there for each other and having the space to learn from one another in the absence of adults."

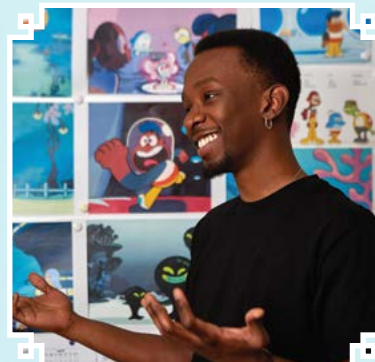
Gariba says he loves that the solutions of his job are usually hidden in silliness. "Story points and strong character jokes are deceptively simple to string through a good story," he explains. "The comedy forces us to take a step back from the project and find the simplicity in the

gag and not over think it all too much. The only way to know that what we're doing is working is when we're laughing. It's a nice way to balance out the stress of building a world on a tight deadline."

"I'm inspired by Richard Williams, Genndy Tartakovsky and Brad Bird," says the 27-year-old artist. "They all have an amazing ability to take an idea and find the comedy, the heart and the action in it while still delivering a fresh story. They do a good job of finding balance in their work and they tend to function on a kid level just as well as on an adult level."

He also has great plans for the future. "I hope to become a better storyteller and to move into writing. Having been a part of productions at different levels I'm really interested in how each department can elevate the next. I'm interested in getting into the core of an idea first on the page — then seeing it through to its visualization."

Gariba leaves us with a great piece of advice. "To consider the responsibility and privilege of helping others dream is not a skill to take lightly."



Continued on page 14

CONGRATULATIONS
TO OUR RISING STAR!

FAWN VEERASUNTHORN

HEAD OF STORY, RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON



FROM YOUR FAMILY AT

WALT DISNEY
ANIMATION STUDIOS

©Disney

FLÁVIA GÜTTLER

Animation Director, *Carmen Sandiego*, WildBrain

"I learned everything on the job and gained a lot of experience from the animators and supervisors around me," says Flávia Güttler, the dynamic animation director of WildBrain's *Carmen Sandiego* series for Netflix. Born in Petrópolis, in the Rio de Janeiro municipality of Brazil, the 33-year-old artist says she was very fortunate to find her first job at a small studio which had a traditional animator as its leader. She recalls, "We always talked about how cut-out animation could be more and how much potential it has, should only traditional methodology be applied to it. That has forever stuck in my mind and it's a philosophy I carry with me to this day, influencing my work entirely."



Güttler says she was deeply influenced by the classic live-action *Batman* series from the 1960s when she was growing up. "That series basically shaped my silly sense of humor and righteousness towards the world. It also made me love neon-bright characters and heroes, plus that crime fighting frilly bike that Batgirl had was just too ridiculously awesome not to make a lasting impression. It was the perfect synthesis between power and action with feminine aesthetic, and it stuck with me to this day!"

Not surprisingly, she fell in love with Bruce Timm's *Batman: The Animated Series* when she was a little older. "With great character development and storylines, it used silly villains and hero archetypes to explore bigger themes

of the real world, society and even psychology. All that in a cartoon for kids! I was hooked and, again, forever influenced by it," she notes.

Güttler always loved to draw but was often told that she couldn't make a decent living through art, so she dropped out of fine arts school. She worked as a designer and web programmer for a few years, and when she was assigned to design and draw animated web banners, she realized she wanted to pursue animation as a career. "I was doing a few doodles and experimenting with Flash when an online friend (from DeviantArt, of all places) told me about an animation studio he worked at. They were desperate, so I went there with just a handful of drawings under my arm and got a job as a junior animator!"

She says she loves her current job at WildBrain because it allows her to develop a show's animation style, finding the characters' personalities and building the rules that make the show look unified. "As the animation director, it's really great to be the one witnessing it all, taking those 'a-ha!' moments and sharing with others, electing the ones to be followed, scooching everyone towards the direction you envisioned and what fits the show."

Her special career tips? "Work, work, work! Hard work pays off and is recognized," Güttler advises. "If you are at a really small studio and you are either not being recognized or too good for it, move on. Find a bigger, more challenging one, change countries in search of opportunity. Also, do anything you can to keep the drawing flame alive and keep practicing. What many new animators fail to see is that, even though we have very stylized cartoons and a lot of cut-out animation on the market, your work will be a thousand times better, more creative and original if you draw and have strong traditional skills to back it up."

SUNIL HALL

Co-Creator/Exec Producer, *The Mighty Ones*, DreamWorks Animation

Sunil Hall's impressive list of TV credits includes high-profile shows such as *Gravity Falls*, *Pickle and Peanut* and *The Penguins of Madagascar*. But 2020 could be his biggest and busiest year ever, since *The Mighty Ones*, the show he co-created and exec produces, will debut on Hulu and Peacock.

The show's origins go back about seven years ago when Hall's friend Lynne Naylor showed him a series of loose cartoon ideas. "She had a sketch of some tiny creatures – a rock, leaf and stick – which I was totally drawn to. They were these side characters in a bigger story. I suggested we focus on those little guys and what their lives are like. Something about these tiny creatures having to navigate a giant unpredictable world really appealed to me. They are inspired by a lot of the interesting eccentric people we have met in the animation industry!"

Hall's interest in animation had a gradual build. "I've always been drawing, and I started taking serious art classes when I was 10. At about 12 or 13 I got into drawing comics. Around that time my mom got a video camera, so I started making films and animated projects. In high school we had a small animation program. My teacher told me about CalArts and I went to an open house. Seeing all the student work was huge for me. I think that was the moment I was like, 'Yeah, this is what I'm doing with my life.'"

After graduating from CalArts, Hall accepted an internship at a small startup studio called StickyFlicks. "I mostly did cleanups, a little design work and I got Starbucks coffee for people. Then I spilled a ton of coffee down my own back. After that, I didn't have to get coffee anymore. My first long-term job was as prop designer on Nickelodeon's *My Life as a Teenage Robot*. It was an amazing crew. I'm still friends with many of the people I

met on that show, and several of them work on *The Mighty Ones*."

Hall says one of the things he loves about his job is that he gets to make stupid jokes and draw with a bunch of funny, talented people. "The show has really grown and changed into something much better than what we started with. Watching all these amazing designers and story people take ownership and push the show to new levels is really awesome," he offers. "The tough part is that no one teaches you how to run a show, they just kind of drop you in."

One of the people who left a lasting impact on Hall was animation director and designer Chris Reccardi, who passed away in 2019. "Chris's work was really influential on me when I was in school. I got to know him when I was at Nickelodeon, and we used to go on snowboarding trips together. He introduced me to his wife Lynne (another animation idol I was lucky



enough to work with) on one of these trips and that meeting kicked off our creative collaboration on *The Mighty Ones*. Chris boarded and wrote part of our pilot episode. I am really lucky to have known him."

Hall also leaves us with some sage advice. He says, "Learn to pace yourself so you don't burn out. Enjoy down time when you can. Get home before your kids go to sleep."

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C O N G R A T U L A T E S

OUR RISING STARS **SUNIL HALL**
AND **PRISCILLA WONG**



NIKI LÓPEZ

Creator/Producer, *Santiago of the Seas*, Nickelodeon

A native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Niki López put a lot of her own cultural heritage and background into the world of Nickelodeon's upcoming series *Santiago of the Seas*. The colorful toon, which is infused with a Spanish-language and Latino-Caribbean culture curriculum, centers on the adventures of a brave and kind-hearted pirate who searches for treasures and keeps the high seas safe from villains.

López, who grew up watching Disney movies such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*, says she was also deeply influenced by the 1992 feature *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*. "I guess that inspired the little environmentalist in me as a kid," she says. "I studied illustration and computer animation at Ringling, and I really wanted to further develop my skills and dig deeper into doing creative work, but I was open to anything."

After a brief stint in advertising, López decided to really start exploring her options in animation. A meeting with a Nickelodeon recruiter



at an animation event led to her landing an internship at the studio in 2009. "I grew up a Nickelodeon kid and the energy and personality of the studio really resonated with me, so I really wanted to be part of it," she recalls. The internship led to gigs on *Kung Fu Panda: Legends of Awesomeness*, *The Fairly OddParents* and *Harvey Beaks*. "I was really inspired by what edgy and fun shows the preschool team was working on. Because the studio has an open-door pitching policy from the staff, I decided to pitch them some ideas, too. After all, what was the worst that could happen? I even took a month's sabbatical and traveled to Puerto Rico and New Orleans to get the right inspirations for the pitch."

The development execs at Nick really liked her pitch, and López's show is set to debut on the cabler later this year. "I am really proud of how cinematic the series looks," she admits. "I love the rich greens and blues, and how the colors are so vibrant and dynamic." She also says that she has learned a lot of great lessons along the way. "As a first-time showrunner, you discover that there are lots of challenges, but they can be huge lessons to help you in the future," says the wise and brilliant 35-year-old artist. "The most important thing is to trust your gut. It's easy to get off track and forget the reason you decided to do something in the first place. Animation is a team effort, but you have to make sure that your voice doesn't get lost. Always be open to collaboration, but don't lose sight of the real core of your vision."

KYLE MCQUEEN

Production Designer, *The Willoughbys*, Netflix

If you want to get a sense of Kyle McQueen's keen artistic eye, you'll have to check out the new Netflix/Bron Studio movie *The Willoughbys* this spring. You will get a good sense of his unique aesthetic style in almost every frame. "The look of *The Willoughbys* came out of wanting to create a visceral and immersive experience for the audience," he says. "We looked at toys, puppetry, stop motion and mid-century children's book illustration to help us build something that felt handmade rather than digital. After all, *The Willoughbys* is an old-fashioned story about kids raised on books!"

Born and raised in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada, McQueen grew up loving shows such as *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Ren & Stimpy*, *Rocky and Bullwinkle* and movies such as *Akira*, *The Iron Giant* and Disney's *Robin Hood*. "And about 6,000 others ... If it was animated, I was watching it," recalls McQueen. "I just always knew that if I could draw for a living, then I could be happy. I do remember watching *The Lion King* and thinking, 'Yup, that's what I'm going to do!'"

He went on to study classical animation at Sheridan College. "I was part of a graduating class of heavy hitters, including Jon Klassen and Vera Brosgol. It took me three tries to get in. So, kids (and adults): *Never give up on your dream*," says the 38-year old. His first job out of college was working as a layout artist on an animated series called *Being Ian* in Vancouver, which led to other industry jobs, including production designer on the 2016 movie *Sausage Party*.

McQueen names Chuck Jones, Michael Maltese, Ward Kimball, Maurice Noble, Craig Kellman, Lou Romano and Genndy Tartakovsky among his growing list of animation idols. He also tells us that he loves creating a harmony between story and style, even though working on movies requires a lot of patience. "These movies take a long, *long* time to make!" he adds.

The in-demand production designer has some very practical tips for those who want to pursue a career in animation. "Leave the sketchbook at home, get outside and experience life. Like, really experience it. Go see bands. Eat weird food. Read books that aren't about animation. Be spontaneous. Make mistakes. Allow yourself the time to truly absorb it. Experience, good or bad, will make your ideas more honest and inspire new ones. The narrower your view of the world, the narrower your contribution to it. Also, leave your ego at the door and don't be a jerk!"



Continued on page 16

NETFLIX

CONGRATULATES

ANIMATION MAGAZINE'S 2020 RISING STARS



**KYLE
McQUEEN**

THE WILLOUGHBYS
APRIL, 2020



**SHION
TAKEUCHI**

INSIDE JOB

STEPHEN NEARY

Creator, *The Fungies*, Cartoon Network/HBO Max

David the Gnome. Gumby. Batman: The Animated Series. Fraggle Rock. Animation creator Stephen Neary says he loved watching these four shows when he was kid growing up in Fort. Wayne, Indiana in the early '90s. "Watching animation as a kid is a totally different experience," he recalls. "Everything felt so saturated and warm. Later, Cartoon Network shows like *Dexter's Lab* and *The Powerpuff Girls* were a huge influence: They were subversive and weird while still checking off all the boxes for a kid's cartoon."

These days, Neary is in charge of his own colorful and immersive world. He is the creator of *The Fungies*, a clever new animated series which debuts on HBO Max later this year. "I was reading about these ancient fungi that grew on Earth about 400 million years ago," he tells us. "Thinking about the world in its 'youth' made me think about being a kid, and what it's like to gradually become more aware of your feelings as your world grows larger and larger. I wanted to explore these ideas in a show that had a sincere tone but was still weird and funny, like other 'creature' shows."

Looking back at his early fascination with animation, Neary says he didn't even know working in animation was a realistic goal. "But I loved cartoons, drew a lot, and made little stop-motion movies in iMovie," he says. "I was studying live action at NYU when I started taking animation classes and fell in love with the medium all over again. Every time I watched a storyboard pitch from a movie's DVD extras I thought, 'That's my dream job.'"

Then in 2005, when his professor Rob Marianetti asked him to help out with some cartoons for SNL's *TV Funhouse* series, he jumped at the chance. "I was so bad at drawing but helped composite and scan animation. Fueled by coffee and Jamba Juice, we'd stay up all Friday night to

finish the cartoon for broadcast the next night. It was insane, but Rob and his studio partner Dave Wachtenheim were very pragmatic and calm about surfing the waves of chaos."

When asked to name his animation idol, Neary mentions Genndy Tartakovsky. "He does original shows, adaptations, movies — everything. *Primal* was incredible, and it's cool to

see industry veterans continue to push the envelope through their careers. It makes me excited to keep learning!"

So, how does it feel to be in charge of his own *Fungies* world? "Making the show is a dream come true," he notes. "I work with so many talented artists, writers and production folks. But if I'm awake, I'm probably thinking about the show on some level. I'm doing the dishes and bam, I remember we need to change something about Scene 141 in episode 26. I love distance running and use that as an excuse to zone out and recharge!"

"I remember telling a recruiter when I was 18 that I wanted to be a director," he recalls. "Very politely, they told me to never tell anyone that: 'A big studio isn't looking for an 18-year-old director.' First, I needed to be able to understand one part of the process inside and out. After that, I tried to focus more on the storyboarding and storytelling aspect of animation. This seems obvious now, but at the time, I was extremely naïve!"



LINDSEY OLIVARES

Production Designer/Lead Character Designer, *Connected*, Sony Pictures Animation

When Lindsey Olivares was a young girl growing up in San Diego, California, she used to love to draw the cover images from her favorite Disney VHS movies from the 1990s. "I loved *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, and really loved to draw those characters. My parents encouraged me to draw, and soon I realized that it was possible to have a career in animation."

Olivares attended a CalArts animation program one summer and got accepted to Ringling College's computer animation program. Then she landed an internship at Disney Animation during her sophomore year. "I learned so much about visual development during that internship," recalls the talented 32-year old. "It was all about taking things beyond just the craft and learning how to use real storytelling to bring your character to animated life."

After landing a position in the art department of PDI in the Bay Area, Olivares worked on DreamWorks' *Madagascar 3* and learned a lot about production design, color keys and art



direction from industry veteran Kendal Cronkhite. She then did some early development work on movies such as *Penguins of Madagascar*, *Trolls* and *The Emoji Movie*. Her career took a huge leap forward a few years ago when she was recommended to director Mike Rianda, who was just beginning to work on his new feature *Connected* at Sony. "We started to work together and I just loved his sense of humor," says Olivares. "His pitch for the movie (which follows a typical family who have to save the world from a global robocalypse) was incredible. I did some character design work for the pitch, and they kept bringing me back. After the movie was greenlit, I was hired as production designer!"

She says she loves the movie's quirky sense of humor and authenticity. "It tells a very honest story, and its observational sense of humor really aligns with a lot of the things I love about art and storytelling," she admits. "The job is very satisfying creatively, and you get to work with this amazing team, so it blends the personal and the creative in a nice way. I also loved working with the 3D team so that the illustration work really comes through in the final render."

Pointing out animation veteran Glen Keane, his daughter Claire Keane and production designer/art director Kendal Cronkhite as three of her idols, Olivares recommends doing the kind of work that you are passionate about. "I was creating animated gifs of day-to-day life and putting them online on my own, and that's what resonated with the movie's director," she points out. "It helps you land the kind of work that you would like to do eventually!"

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CONGRATULATIONS NIKI LÓPEZ FOR BEING A RISING STAR OF ANIMATION!

CREATOR & CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
SANTIAGO OF THE SEAS



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KATIE RICE

Director, *Animaniacs*, Warner Bros. Animation/Hulu

Next time someone tells you that you've got to go to one of the usual prestigious schools to get a career in animation, remember the example set by brilliant director Katie Rice, who is currently working on the new *Animaniacs* series from Warner Bros. Animation. The Marin County native tried to get into CalArts twice, but when she didn't get in the second time, she decided to move to L.A. and look for animation work. "I failed, so I moved back home, saved up money from waitressing, and then tried again! The second time stuck," says Rice.

Rice, who has worked on shows such as *El Tigre* and *DC Super Hero Girls* and the feature *The Book of Life*, says she has always been in love with all things Disney as long as she has been conscious. Then, she adds, "But when I was about nine years old and the original Nicktoons debuted, I knew I wanted to make art like that myself!"

"My first job was inking traditionally and doing other odd jobs at a small independent studio," Rice recalls. "That was about 20 years ago, when inking was still done on paper!" Now that she's working on the reboot of *Animaniacs*, she finds the enthusiasm and the collaboration of her team quite wonderful. "This is one of the best crews I've worked with," she admits. "I feel like I'm surrounded by super-talents who are also incredibly nice. It's very inspiring and makes coming into work easy, despite the challenges of working on a show as big as this."

Of course, adapting to the cinematic quality of a Spielberg-produced

cartoon has its own challenges. "It can be a bit intimidating, especially for someone who is used to working in a flatter, more traditional comedic style. But overcoming artistic challenges is extremely rewarding, and I do feel like working on *Animaniacs* has allowed me to level up as an artist!"

When asked about her idols, Rise says, "I have always looked up to Lynne Naylor, whose drawings are just so full of life and appeal, and Mary Blair for being so talented that she was impossible to ignore, even during the ink-and-paint-girl days. Right now, my biggest idols

are everyone who's doing their best to make our industry more inclusive, kind and safe."

Her future plans include working to help other people's shows, but one day Rice hopes to run her own productions and telling her own stories. "I've got a lot of them in me!" she says, and we know she's not kidding.



SHION TAKEUCHI

Creator, *Inside Job*, Netflix

Shion Takeuchi, the creator and showrunner of Netflix's upcoming animated series *Inside Job*, knew she wanted to pursue a career in animation when she saw her first pencil test at the School of Visual Arts' summer program. "It was incredible to see my drawings brought to life, and up until then I really had no concept that you could make a living as an artist in animation," says the talented 31-year old. "After that, I immediately began plotting on my campaign to ask my parents if I could go to art school. Luckily, they were very supportive!"

After studying character animation at CalArts, Takeuchi landed a job as a storyboard artist on Cartoon Network's popular series *Regular Show*, which led to more opportunities on shows such as *Gravity Falls*, *We Bare Bears* and *Disenchantment*, as well as story artist gigs on Pixar's *Monsters University* and *Inside Out*.

The inspiration for her upcoming series? "When I came up with the idea for *Inside Job*, the 2016 election was around the corner, and it felt like a lot of reality as we knew it was going off the rails," she recalls. "In the past, I'd always pictured



the classic Shadow Government portrayal as kind of terrifying, all-powerful. I found myself thinking that a nice, stable, hyper-competent shadow cabal that would seamlessly puppeteer the world order might actually be a comforting thing, which is crazy. Of course, if human beings are going to be in charge of anything it's going to be a raw, chaotic, hot mess, and then I thought, that's a workplace comedy I'd like to watch!"

For Takeuchi, the best thing about being a showrunner is having so many talented people around her. "I love collaborating with my team and seeing the show and characters take on a life of their own," she says. "That, and the fact that my day is never boring. It can be crazy, amazing, horrible, wonderful — but never boring. Sometimes, a little boring would be nice!"

She says she's also forever grateful to the women who struggled and fought tooth and nail to break the glass ceiling before her. "People like Brenda Chapman, Lauren Faust, Jennifer Yuh Nelson and countless more — because the industry I see today is far more welcoming of female creators than ever before," she notes. "Because of their fight I was lucky to have arrived at a time where I can speak my mind, have a vision that is trusted, and feel safe and valued, which many pioneer women before me never got to. We still have room for improvement as an industry, of course, but I am confident that we are moving in a positive direction."

What about long-term plans? "When this show is done, I know I will desperately need a vacation, a haircut and some new creative goal to work towards," she says with a smile. "But I can figure that out later!"

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Flavia Güttler

Animation Director &
Animation Magazine Rising Star

WildBrain Studios is proud to be
the home of all-star artists in 2D and 3D animation



DENISE VAN LEEUWEN

Creator, *Pol the Pirate Mouse*, *Submarine*

When Submarine studio founder Bruno Felix was seeking an artist to help him with a pitch for the animated show *Wellie Wishers*, he reached out to Denise van Leeuwen after seeing her work online. “He thought I was a good fit for the project, so I worked with him and we won the pitch,” she recalls. “I didn’t expect it at all, because I had never worked in animation before. The task was to adapt the look of Mattel’s vinyl doll into a 2D drawing style for animation.”

Growing up in the Netherlands, van Leeuwen was enamored with Disney classics such as *Dumbo* and *Mary Poppins*, and loved catching *The Wonderful World of Disney* series on TV. “I didn’t even think that it would be possible to work in animation back then,” she says. “Drawing was my hobby and eventually I found myself working as an illustrator. Then came this call from Bruno out of the blue, and I found myself working with so many talented people on this animated show. It was a welcome change from drawing in my studio alone for a decade.”

She soon found herself wanting to go back the world of animation, so she came up with the idea for a new animated show, called *Pol the Pirate Mouse*, which she and the team at Submarine presented at Cartoon Forum in France last year. “I had drawn this mouse character

for a personal [piece] for the ‘National Museum’ (Nationaal Museum), where artists share their personal artwork about mice,” says the gifted artist. “Then I showed it to Bruno and I kept drawing, and the project grew. Gaumont Animation is involved as well, and we hope to get a broadcaster involved as well.”



For now, van Leeuwen is hoping to continue watching her images come to animated life. “In illustration, you just do work on one drawing and then move on to the next one,” she says. “In animation, you have more time to create a bigger world, and it’s so exciting to see your drawings come to life. It’s truly a magical experience.”

PRASANSOOK “FAWN” VEERASUNTHORN

Head of Story, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, Disney

Never underestimate the powerful impact a high school visit from an animator can have. Just ask Prasansook “Fawn” Veerasunthorn, the head of story on Disney’s winter 2020 feature release *Raya and the Last Dragon*. “I didn’t even think a career in animation was possible, until a Thai effects animator who was working at Disney Animation came to give a talk at my high school in Bangkok. His career and story inspired me to apply to art college.”

Veerasunthorn, who has previously worked as a story artist on Disney’s *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, *Zootopia*, *Moana* and *Frozen*, studied at Columbus College of Art & Design. “Although I knew next to nothing about baseball or football, I got my first job as an animator at a score-board animation company in Ohio called Jamination!” she says.

She names a wide variety of animated movies and TV shows that have inspired

her through the years, and they include *Dumbo*, *I Lost My Body*, *Detective Conan*, *Sailor Moon* and *Crayon Shin-chan*.

“I love the challenge of starting from a blank page and having to come up with something interesting to engage the audience,” she adds.



Of course, she’s most excited to reflect the rich colors and visuals of her own culture to Disney’s *Raya and the Last Dragon*. “I’m super excited to bring the beautiful Southeast Asian cultures to the big screen. I’m especially excited to be drawing a female teenage warrior being unapologetically athletic and awesome. I can’t wait for the world to see what we’ve been up to.”

The 37-year-old Thailand native says she would love to direct her own project one day and leaves us with this helpful advice: “The best career advice I got was to apply for a job you want, even if you might not feel ready,” she shares. “And the worst advice was to settle for a comfortable job instead of the one that challenges you!”

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**GU
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2020 RISING STARS**

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J. P. VINE

Director, *Ron's Gone Wrong*, Locksmith Animation

"Don't overthink your skill level, and always bring a willingness to learn. Your colleagues will possess massive skills to help you grow. When you are starting off as an animator and are receiving notes from creatives, ask yourself what they care about the most. What's most important about a shot, sequence or piece of art? It's a focusing question that will make the process flow!"

Those excellent words of advice come from J.P. (Jean-Philippe) Vine, who is directing his first animated feature *Ron's Gone Wrong*, Locksmith Animation's maiden project (slated for a 2021 release). Vine, who was born in Curepipe, Mauritius, says he loved Aardman's shorts growing up, but his biggest influences were French comic books and British classics by Raymond Briggs and Roald Dahl. After studying theater design in London, he found himself building sets and props for companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company.

"Through prop work I found my way to work on Aardman's *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* as a set dresser," he recalls. "On that movie, the dressers would all watch the previous day's rushes in dailies, and I realized the animators were having the most fun. I started bugging them for tips and took old characters home to teach myself. I was hooked. I even got some shots in the film. They were only rabbits, but hey!"

He also directed episodes of Aardman's *Shaun the Sheep* series and worked as a storyboard artist on *The Pirates! Band of Misfits*, *Inside Out*

and *The Good Dinosaur*. His upcoming movie *Ron's Gone Wrong* is set in a world where walking, talking, digitally connected "bots" have become children's best friends, and tells the story of an 11-year-old boy who finds that his robot buddy Ron doesn't quite work.

"I love working with performance: whether it's with an actor, an animator, a story artist," notes the 43-year-old helmer. "I love the energy



that erupts when we get excited about an idea ... And I love working with design. Lots to love. The challenge is the volume of decisions that have to be tracked throughout the whole film. We're working all over the film at all times so it can be challenging to hold it all in place."

His take on the state of animation worldwide?

"I'm delighted that more creators are being backed on streaming platforms, and that animation tools are becoming so much more accessible. My nine-year-old has just started animating in Procreate, which I love!"

PRISCILLA WONG

Visual Development Artist, *Trolls World Tour*, DreamWorks Animation

When you catch the new DreamWorks' feature *Trolls World Tour* in theaters in April, look out for the amazing "scrapbook" pages showcased in the picture. These are terrific examples of the artistic talents of visual development artist Priscilla Wong, the 30-year-old visual development artist who also worked on the first *Trolls* movie and the 2014 feature *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*. The pages were all initially made by hand with felt, fabrics, etc., and then each page was scanned digitally and used in the dazzlingly colorful feature.

"I love that I get to express myself through art," says the San Francisco-born and raised artist. "I love that DreamWorks has embraced my explo-



ration of different mediums, knowing that freedom of expression is what pushes the envelope in animation.

Any chance that I get to share my experiences with other people through art is a blessing in life. The most challenging aspect of the job is topping my last project!"

The San Jose State University graduate says it's her passion to create a world that audiences have never seen before, and counts *Sailor Moon*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Spirited Away*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Hey Arnold!*, *Rugrats* and *SpongeBob SquarePants* as some of her earliest influences. "Hayao Miyazaki, Kendal Cronkhite and Sean Charmatz are my animation idols. All artists who are deeply passionate about their craft, succeed by embracing teamwork and, maybe most, are kind." ♦



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Building on a Legacy of Excellence

Russia's Soyuzmultfilm unveils an ambitious slate of animated projects across different media.

Fans of world animation don't need any introduction to the legacy of Soyuzmultfilm, the acclaimed Moscow-based studio that has produced over 1,500 cartoons since it opened its doors in 1936. Best known for titles such as *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Gena the Crocodile*, *The Snow Queen*, *Mowgli*, *I Will Get You!* and *Hedgehog in the Fog*, the team at Soyuzmultfilm use a variety of animation techniques, included stop-motion, clay and hand-drawn animation to produce their well-loved projects. Today, the company is active in both feature films, TV series and shorts production and distribution, guided by a view toward the future combined with a commitment to preserving tradition.

"The studio is also a multifaceted group of production, educational facilities, a thriving licensing business, an animation technology park, a children's educational and recreational center, in-house advanced training for animators, and a network of multimedia centers," says studio's director Boris Mashkovtsev. "Although the studio was founded almost 85 years ago, the new era of the studio as a modern entity began about three years ago," adds the studio's chairwoman of the board Yuliana Slascheva. "The company has made tremendous strides and has become a production leader in the country: We had over 600 minutes of finished product last year. We currently employ over 300 people, 250 of which are engaged in production work."

"Our short films reflect our roster of young and talented animators to experiment and produce more artistic animation," adds Yuliana Slascheva. "Some of the studio's outstanding projects won awards at top festivals around the world, including the London Intl. Film Festival and the Annecy Intl. Animation Festival. In 2018, we released the long-awaited feature *Hoffmaniada*, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival. Our next feature is the historic epic *Suvorov*, which will be released in 2020."

A Diverse Slate of Projects

The artists at Soyuzmultfilm are also developing and producing a wide range of animated series targeting both younger and older family audiences. In recent years, the company has also developed several unique technological solutions, which will be to be patented. "Our specialists have access to the latest, state-of-the-art technological equipment and can work in any technique they would like to," says Slascheva. "We are glad to be able to give them this opportunity. We also have special equipment for clay animation and a wonderful stop-motion production hall. Russian animation has come a long way, and we've preserved unique techniques: For example, *Mr. Theo*, *Cat & Dog* is produced via hand-drawn animation, which is highly labor-intensive and expensive to produce. It's still a colossal manual work that preserves the unique style of Soyuzmultfilm projects that audiences expect to see."

Among the current animated projects of the studio is *Orange Moo Cow*, an animat-

ed preschool show co-produced by France's Cyber Group Studios, a musical show title *Squared Zebra*, *The Adventures of Peter and Wolf*, *Mr. Theo*, *Cat and Dog* and *Clay-motions*.

Inspired by new collaborations with Cyber Group Studios, Soyuzmultfilm plans to expand co-productions for several projects aimed at preschool and school audiences.

Both Slascheva and Mashkovtsev are quite excited about the future of the studio as they work on different avenues to expand the reach and activities of their company. "Soyuzmultfilm is not only an animation studio that produces 600 minutes of content a year, but also a technology park which provides facilities for other studios in CGI, motion capture, stop-motion, cut-out and hand drawn animation," they add. "The studio works not only as a film production company, but as a structural element of children culture. It includes two museums devoted to the history of animation. It organizes exhibitions, festivals and master-classes through all the country. Children's *Soyuzmultclub* is a unique development center for children ages four and older, where they learn different animation techniques. There is also a recording studio that helps showcase children's talents who wants to sing or to be a cartoon voice actor, for example. The studio is also quite active in preserving puppet and clay animation. We have developed a new production facility, with plans to produce at least one animated short (with puppet and clay animation) each year.

"As we can all see, the animation business has grown in more ways than anyone could have predicted," they conclude. "We're sure that both Russian and international animation will continue to develop rapidly in the years ahead. The future will certainly bring about many possibilities of the most unexpected collaborations between different industries and countries." ♦

For more info, visit b2b.souzmult.com



Boris Mashkovtsev



Yuliana Slascheva

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A Love Letter to Our Planet

Studio AKA adapts Oliver Jeffers' popular book into a stunning animated special, which debuts on Earth Day on Apple TV+.

By Ramin Zahed

Irish children's author and illustrator Oliver Jeffers' 2017 book *Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth* is the kind of charmingly illustrated and conceived project that lends itself beautifully to animation. So, it's no wonder that Studio AKA (*Hey Duggee*, *The Amazing World of Gumball*) animation producer Sue Goffe and director/writer/exec producer Philip Hunt jumped at the chance of adapting the book as a special for Apple TV+, just in time for the 50th annual Earth Day on April 22, 2020.

As Goffe recalls, "We'd been discussing with Oliver Jeffers what project we would like to do together next, as we were developing a portfolio of his books that we'd like to adapt to film, when Oliver showed us pencil sketches of his new book. There was no doubt this had to be the next film Studio AKA made."

Fortunately, this coincided with a very early meeting Goffe had with Tara Sorensen, Head of Kids' Programming at Apple. "We pitched the film to her and together decided we would want to launch the animated short film for the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day," says the producer. Together with Apple, the team developed the script and design/concept work in early 2018.

A team of about 60 people worked on the project at Studio AKA's London space. The production used Maya for the majority of the 3D work and Arnold for rendering, Houdini for some 3D effects work, Nuke for compositing, TVPaint for 2D animation and After Effects for some 2D compositing. Substance Painter and Photoshop were also employed for texturing, while ZBrush was used for modelling, Photoshop for design work and Resolve for grading, per Angela Edmonds, animation producer for Studio AKA.



lished book on which the film is based, and once we had seen them, we were hooked."

Hunt mentions that the key to the special relationship with the author is that he is never interested in creating a simple "moving version" of his books. "Oliver is always looking for what animation can bring, or what else can be brought to the story, and his collaboration and encouragement were vital in finding our way with *Here We Are*," says the director. "His linework and color sense are always exploring new directions, and he provides much of the artwork used in the film."

According to Goffe, one of the project's biggest challenges was delivering the short film on time. "We hit several creative and technical challenges along the way that impacted the schedule, but as April 22 this year is the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day,

slipping the launch day back wasn't an option," she explains.

Beyond the practical concerns, the team was driven by the desire to ensure that Oliver Jeffers' voice could be heard through the dialog and the spirit of his beloved book could be recognized by his fans. "*Here We Are* is not a regular picture book. As a 'beginner's guide' to Earth, it is an uplifting snapshot of life on our planet, and what it means to those who call it home," explains Hunt. "The film is inspired by the book to tell a bigger story, and Apple wanted to bring out

the perspective for a wider family. The idea of introducing the world to a child 'one thing at a time' remains anchored as a pivotal story point. But, we realized that by placing the storyline a few years down the line, the child could better engage with both the world — and his parents — and open up the story to

Oliver's Fan Club

Hunt, who also helmed the award-winning 2008 adaptation of Jeffers' *Lost and Found*, says there are many reasons he looked forward to this new collaboration. "Oliver is extremely dedicated to this project and truly brought a worldly touch as he worked closely on aspects

'If we can bring an audience together even for a moment in appreciation of the film, then we will have honored what Oliver Jeffers sought to do with the book.'

— Director/exec producer Philip Hunt



of the film with us from wherever he was in the world," the director notes. "Since adapting his bestselling *Lost and Found* into a BAFTA-winning film, we have maintained a regular working relationship. It was Oliver that set everything in motion by trusting us with his early sketches and ideas for the as-yet unpub-



the full potential of a family experience and interaction with the film.”

Creating Wonderment and Whimsy

The director also points out that structuring this story into something relatable while allowing the project to maintain a strong sense of lyricism was an adventure in itself. “We were fortunate enough that our co-writer Luke Matheny was able to help us find the balance we were looking for,” he notes. “In the final film, we are afforded a glimpse into the beautiful logic of children — and how baffling it can be for parents — expressed in moments of wonderment, worry and whimsy to which everyone on Earth can still relate.”

Hunt is quite proud of the fact that the animated adaptation has developed into something that feels unlike anything else out there for a broad audience. “Despite the expansion of the narrative, Oliver’s hand remains across the film,” says the director. “We love the way we’ve managed to include so much original artwork from Oliver into the film, so that his visual signature can be felt across the story. This has been a very special project and we’ve loved bringing this book to life.”

He is also quick to give credit to the project’s wide range of talent that came together from all corners of the world to make it happen. “It has been a very collaborative project across the team and the work of everyone involved made for a hugely enjoyable experience,” says Hunt. “We were lucky enough to secure Maddy Wyckens as art director, and she skillfully guided the production design team to find our interpretation of Oliver in the film. Meanwhile, animation supervisor Laurent Rossi conducted our animation team to pull moments of nuance and humor out of the performances. The

CG team, under the supervision of James Gagliardi, achieved incredible depth and warmth from sets and characters, and this went on right across the team we assembled. The joy of adding a score by Alex Somers and sound design by Adrian Rhodes was always going to be the icing on the cake, and we can’t wait to share it with audiences around the world.”

One of the production’s secret weapons is its stellar voice cast, which includes Meryl

“When Oliver [Jeffers] showed us pencil sketches of his new book, there was no doubt this had to be the next film Studio AKA made.”

— Producer Sue Goffe



were humbled to get her, along with the other amazing voice cast.”

Casting Jacob Tremblay (*Room*) as Finn came out of a brilliant suggestion from Apple’s head of casting. Goffe says it was joy to hear his exuberance and wonderment throughout the film as he comes to an understanding of the world, and his place in it. “He truly is the anchor to the film and has brought a wide-eyed perspective to the little things that we can do to make a bigger contribution,” she adds.

“As the voice of the book, the character of the father was personal to Oliver, and from the outset, Chris O’Dowd was always our first choice for the dad,” she notes. “We wanted someone Irish, and he has the perfect mix of warmth and comic timing, and his performance was a gift for the animation team. In opening up the narrative to bring the family into focus, we wanted the character of the mother to set the tone and act as a calming presence throughout. Ruth Negga was our choice for the mum and she brings a wonderful calm, maternal quality to her beautiful performance.”

Hunt and Goffe both see the new special as a love letter to the planet, told not only from the perspective of a new parent, but also shifting the gaze to look through the eyes of a curious child. “For a family who wants to make sense of a world that can be a bewildering place, the messages are simple, and never more prescient,” says Hunt. “This is a timely story for young and old alike, and we think it will resonate with new parents and young families in particular. If we can bring an audience together even for a moment in appreciation of the film, then we will have honored what Oliver sought to do with the book.” ♦

Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth premieres on Apple TV+ on April 22.



Big, Blue Marble: *Here We Are: Notes on Planet Earth* offers a loving, animated take on Oliver Jeffers’ acclaimed children’s book.

Doggedly Delightful

A resilient street pooch and his feline buddy are the heroes of Dandelooo's new children's toon, *Stinky Dog*.

Who doesn't love a spirited hero who never lets life's trials and tribulations get him down? Add to that the fact that he is a smelly dog and you may have a bonafide animated hit on your hands! At least, that's what the producers of new animated series *Stinky Dog* are hoping for! The beautifully crafted 52 x 13-minute show, which is co-produced by Paris-based boutique studio Dandelooo (*The Treehouse Stories*, *Chico Chica Boumba*), Folivari, Panique! and Pikkukala, is ready to take on the world. Dandelooo's partners Emmanuèle Pétry Sirvin and Jean-Baptiste Wéry were kind enough to answer a few questions about the upcoming show.

Can you tell us a bit about the development history of the show?

Sirvin and Wéry: While searching for books to adapt for *The Treehouse Stories*, Marc Boutavant, the famous illustrator and children's book writer, gave us the first copy of *Stinky Dog*, before its huge publishing success. We adapted and incorporated the character into the first teaser for *The Treehouse Stories* (a highly successful preschool live-action and 2D animation series).

What attracted you to the property?

We liked the non-PC situations of the books, its quirky tone and humor, the stupid but charming Stinky Dog and the smart friendship with the loyal Flatty Cat.

Why do you think it stands out from other shows about dogs and cats?

These are anti-heroes, street bums, happy about their position in the city. It is a "best friend" series with an edge, celebrating kindness and optimism. Stinky Dog is an adorable stupid loser who always falls back on his paws, unknowingly. It is rare to see such anti-heroes in an animated series. *Stinky Dog* is funny, well written and a great creator-based and character-driven show which will touch children's hearts.

Where is the animation produced and what kind of animation tools are used?

This 2D series is commissioned by France Televisions and is totally produced in France. We use Toon Boom tools to create the anima-



tion. Over a hundred people work on the series. Our ballpark budget is 8.2 million euros (\$8.9 million).

What would you say was your toughest challenge as you developed and produced the show?

In the development stage, we had to move away from the fact that Stinky Dog is a true victim in the books and the cruelty of human beings on him was just not possible in a series. In the animation itself, the challenge was the design and movements of Stinky Dog such as making his hair flow, adapting all the funny puns that exist in the books and recreating the "new" Paris streets, underground tunnels (catacombs), famous monuments and the atmosphere/ambiance.

What do you hope audiences will get out of Stinky Dog?

We hope they get a strong sense of optimism and learn that being nice can make you become a true hero. Also turning around people's perception, i.e. viewing "weak" people as potential winners.



What kind of feedback have you received so far?

Buyers are somewhat puzzled by these new crazy, energy-driven stories, but they find him adorable with his clumsiness and wild and hairy pursuits.

What's your take on the TV animation scene in France and around the world?

More than ever, we notice that there's a stronger urge than ever for artistic visions (based on books and/or creator's work) and serialized series in order to capture attention and sustain emotions, thanks to the new platforms and changing viewing habits. ♦

For more info, visit dandelooo.com.

Spreading Love in Fluffytown

Producer Chapman Maddox tells us all about the charming new British preschool show *Love Monster*.

By Ramin Zahed

A whole lot of people seem to have fallen for *Love Monster*, a new animated series that generated one million requests on BBC's iPlayer during its first three weeks. The 54 x 7-minute show, produced by Boat Rocker Studios, BBC Children and China's UYoung, follows the adventures of the only monster in Fluffytown as he learns important lessons about kindness, love and empathy from his friends.

Exec producer Chapman Maddox (*Danger Mouse*, *Dick Figures: The Movie*), Boat Rocker Studios' VP of development and production, first found out about the property from a literary consultant who brought Rachel Bright's books to his attention. "From our first meeting with Rachel, she was incredibly collaborative and provided us so much background to the world of *Love Monster*. A couple of producers from the BBC and I ended up going down to Rachel's family's cabins (made by hand!) in Dorset for a few days and together came up with all the characters and developed the world of Fluffytown. We then brought on Sindy Boveda-Spackman as the development writer to create the bible based on our ideas and write the first two scripts. That's how the series was born."

The producer says he was quite impressed by Bright's illustrations and art style. "Her work is so distinctive and unique within the children's book world, it just immediately attracts your eye when you see it," he explains. "When you read the *Love Monster* books, you can't help but fall in love with him as a character and the way his little mind works. Rachel has a tremendous skill of telling heartfelt stories in a funny and quirky way, which also deeply resonate emotionally for kids of all ages."

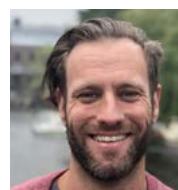
The series is animated in the U.K., where the work is shared between Karrot Animation (*Sarah & Duck*) in London and A Productions in Bristol, with some pre-production work done at UYoung. The production uses the popular



animation tool CelAction to bring the images to life. According to Maddox, about 80 people work on the series all together. "*Love Monster* is the first show I have worked on that is really for everyone, no matter age, gender, nationality, etc.," he adds. "He is such a universal

"This is the first show I have worked on that is really for everyone, no matter age, gender, nationality, etc. He is all about solving problems with love, which we all can relate to."

— Exec producer Chapman Maddox



in the U.K., Maddox responds, "As a fan of animation, we are obviously in an exciting time with so much animation getting made and the larger entertainment industry seeing the importance of the children's industry. However, with an abundance of content for audiences

to choose from, it's even more competitive for new series to generate that connection. I think we all have to be more creative in the ways

character, because at his core — and at the center of the series — he is all about solving problems with love, which we all can relate to. My second most-loved thing would be the unbelievably talented people I have had the pleasure of working with across the entire production. They are the best!"

However, Maddox admits that working in the seven-minute format was a bit of a challenge for him. "Fitting a cohesive story and lots of comedy into this time frame is always a challenge when you have such great characters, but we pulled it off (I hope)."

When asked about the state of animation

in which we promote and engage audiences with our shows to sustain interest and connectivity."

For now, Maddox is just happy that *Love Monster* has captured the attention of so many viewers in such a short time. "Honestly, I hope audiences laugh and that it makes them smile during their day," he adds. "Deeper than that, I hope it helps kids (big and small) grow a little more confident in their own ability to deal with life's issues with love and humor." ♦

***Love Monster* airs at 4 p.m. weekdays on CBeebies and is available on BBC iPlayer.**

Creatures in a Backpack

Viewers get the chance to enter the charming world of *Ollie's Pack* and meet its many monsters on Nickelodeon this month.

A magical backpack serves as a portal to a world of monsters in *Ollie's Pack*, a new show debuting on Nickelodeon in April. The 2D-animated show is created by Pedro Eboli (*Cupcake & Dino*) and Graham Peterson (*Rick and Morty*) and produced by Nelvana studios in Toronto.

Eboli and Peterson met at the Vancouver Film School and have been friends for over a decade. The series originated from *Monster Pack*, an original short produced at Birdo Studio for Nickelodeon's 2013 International Animated Shorts Program. "Ollie's Pack first came to be from a series of idea sessions between the two of us," Eboli and Peterson tell us in an email interview. "We started off with a question that we felt we could explore in a compelling and meaningful way: 'What if a kid was bestowed a great power but had no instruction manual on how to use it or control it?' That was eventually followed by: 'Now, what if there was no evil to fight with it?' The one thing that stayed pretty consistent throughout the development process were the characters' personalities, their friendship and the dynamic between them."

The two creators are big aficionados of sci-fi and pop culture. "We felt inspired at the time to tell a compelling science-fiction story with a supernatural vastness to it," says Peterson. "It can be easy to get carried away sometimes with that, so we always come back to the most important ideas that the characters need to be the focus of the story, and the issues relatable and grounded, and that it needs to be funny. This allowed us to poke fun at our own seriousness, while still feeling fun and heartfelt, and those tend to be some of the best moments in the show."

Clean Lines, Memorable Monsters

The show is produced using Toon Boom Harmony software for all animation and VFX



Pedro Eboli



Graham Peterson

work, and overall about 225 people work on the show, including management and voice actors. The producers point out that the overall look of the show was a constant evolution of the style and tone from the first pitch all the way to the development process. "For the short, the backgrounds had a slight expressionist approach in both the off-kilter lines and focus on bold colors and a fully textured and painterly color style," they note. "The goal was to make the locations elaborate and full because of the limited scene count to help expand the world and also to contrast to

the character designs. While it worked for the short, the show needed both a more production-friendly style of backgrounds, but also something that reflected the updated character designs and storytelling we were going for. We wanted to go for thinner and cleaner lines to ground the world in reality a bit more, while also still keeping it full and intricate with details."

The challenge was to do so without making it too sharp and graphic or overdoing the details and depth, which puts lots of strain on the artists. "We love painterly textures, so we tried to keep small amounts of it where we could to help create depth and some looseness to the backgrounds," says Eboli. "The goal was for the color pass to keep the bold colors we love, and then push for more environmental tone

and lighting pass to help express mood, ambience and the feel of the grandness of the world, while still feeling grounded in the lines. The designers did a wonderful job balancing all of this on the show."

As audiences get ready to unpack their backpacks for the summer, the producers hope they will have a connection to Ollie's world and the characters they have created. "We really explore some timely and relatable issues in our stories, and we hope that our audience can see themselves, a family member or a friend in those situations and can get some perspective out of that," they note. "Mostly, we'd like to see our audience sitting down to watch the show to catch a funny and heartfelt story and follow along with characters that could easily be like their friends and neighbors in real life and just have a bunch of laughs!" ♦

Ollie's Pack premieres on Nickelodeon in April. It will debut internationally later this year.



THINK BEYOND

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